DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 913 CG 029 613

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TITLE Social Justice Advocacy with Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgendered Persons.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 10p.; Chapter 9 in "Advocacy in Counseling: Counselors, Clients, & Community"; see CG 029 604.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 201 Ferguson Building, P.O. Box 26171, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171. Tel: 800-414-9769 (Toll Free); Fax: 336-334-4116; e-mail: ericcass@uncg.edu; Web site: <http://ericcass.uncg.edu>.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advocacy; *Bisexuality; *Counselor Role; Cultural Context; *Homosexuality; *Lesbianism; Resources; Sexual Identity; Violence; World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS Heterosexism; *Injustice; *Oppression; Sexual Orientation; Transsexuals

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of counselors as advocates for lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered (LBGT) individuals as encouraged by the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Definitions are offered for the following terms: sexual orientation, sexual preference, gender identity, heterosexism, and transgenderism. This paper offers that there are many ways for a professional counselor to be an advocate for LBGT individuals. One way for heterosexual and traditionally gendered persons to challenge heterosexism and transgenderism is to develop awareness and knowledge about the privileges that they enjoy as heterosexual and traditionally gendered people in society. A list is provided that identifies a portion of the privileges enjoyed by heterosexual and traditionally gendered persons. It is also important for professional counselors interested in LBGT advocacy to have direct experiences with LBGT persons in a variety of professional and personal situations. This interaction provides a chance for heterosexual and traditionally gendered advocates to hone their awareness, knowledge, and skills so that LBGT persons do not always assume the lead in challenging heterosexism and transgenderism. LBGT individuals are oppressed in many ways. Because of the additive nature of multiple oppressions, people with additional nondominant cultural identities may be targets of multiple forms of persecution. Culturally competent advocates in counseling take all of a person's cultural identities into account when collaborating on advocacy strategies. A list of advocacy strategies related to internalized and externalized oppression is also provided. A list if LBGT advocacy web sites is included as well. (Contains 12 references.) MKA)

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ED 435 913

Chapter Nine

Social Justice Advocacy with Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgendered Persons

Stuart F. Chen-Hayes

"I've been harassed in my school. It's been physical sometimes. It's been bad. I've reported it and nothing's been done. This year when I go back to school, if I get harassed and nothing happens I'm on my school's case from now on. I've learned I have rights and I don't have to put up with that. I'm just now saying "Hey, forget this!"

Renee, a lesbian youth, quoted in *Free Your Mind* (1996)

"I attended the memorial march in honor of Matthew Shepard's horrible death to protest hate crimes. As I watched some NYPD officers kick, beat, and use horses to attack the peaceful marchers, I was beyond rage. In reflecting on the police officers' production of violence during a civilian anti-violence march, I realized the United States structurally uses fear and force through public and private institutions to keep us queers down, out, and anything but equal."

A gay man of transgender experience at the October 1998 Matthew Shepard political funeral in New York City

LGBT Advocacy 101

Lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered (LBGT) clients, co-workers, and community members are often daily targets of oppression in schools, organizations, and communities. They are subjected to this oppression based on their nondominant sexual orientations, gender identities or both (Bass & Kaufman, 1996; Blumenfeld, 1992; Broun & Rounsley, 1996; Pharr, 1988, 1996; Barret, 1998). Professional counselors of diverse sexual

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orientations and gender identities are an excellent advocacy resource for LBGT persons challenging oppression.

The American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (ACA, 1995) encourages counselors to affirm clients' sexual orientation. *Sexual orientation* can be defined as a multivariable dynamic that includes past, present, and ideal feelings about who is attractive, or desirable in sexual and romantic ways or both. It can include one's sexual attractions, behaviors, fantasies, gender emotional preference, gender social preference, sexual identity in a community (lesbian, bisexual, gay, or heterosexual), and use of a sexual identity self-label (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985). There is no definitive answer for how sexual orientation occurs; it is on a continuum and can be fluid or fixed over a person's lifetime. The term *sexual preference,* in contrast, is vague and unhelpful as it implies that persons choose their orientation and many people believe they did not choose their sexual orientation (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992; Barret, 1998).

Although sexual orientation is addressed in the ACA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, gender identity is not. *Gender identity* is a person's internal, subjective experience of how he or she feels as a "gendered" person in terms of gender roles, attitudes, and behaviors. It may or may not "match" a person's genitals, clothing, or other gendered signals and cues. A person's gender identity is based on various personal, social, and cultural factors.

Heterosexism and *transgenderism* are the forms of oppression that relate to violence against and hatred of people in the nondominant group in terms of both sexual orientation (lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men) or gender identity (transgendered persons including transsexuals, cross-dressers, intersexuals, drag queens, drag kings, and so forth). Heterosexism is the use of prejudice multiplied by power used by members of the dominant sexual orientation (heterosexual) toward members of nondominant sexual orientations (lesbian, bisexual, and gay) to restrict their access to resources (individual, cultural, and institutional/systemic). Transgenderism is prejudice multiplied by power used by traditionally gendered persons toward nontraditionally gendered persons (transgendered, transsexual, cross-dressers, intersexuals, drag queens, and drag kings) to restrict their access to resources (individual, cultural, and institutional/systemic).

Acknowledging and Challenging Heterosexual and Traditionally Gendered Privileges

There are many ways for a professional counselor to be an advocate with lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered persons. One way for heterosexual and traditionally gendered persons to challenge heterosexism and transgenderism is to develop awareness and knowledge about the privileges that they enjoy as heterosexual and traditionally gendered people in our society. The following list identifies just a small portion of the privileges enjoyed by heterosexuals and traditionally gendered persons:

- No mental health or medical "professionals" advocate against heterosexual or traditionally gendered persons as mentally ill or in need of conversion therapies or reversal of "gender dysphoria"
- Ability to be affectionate in public without fear of retribution, harassment, or other forms of violence for heterosexuals and traditionally gendered persons
- Legal recognition of life commitments/partnerships for heterosexuals
- Health care/bereavement benefits with legally sanctioned marriage for heterosexuals
- No worry about loss of a job, friendship or family due to one's sexual orientation or gender identity
- Hospital visiting privileges for heterosexuals
- Ability to become a citizen through marriage for heterosexuals
- Ability to see positive images of heterosexual and traditionally gendered persons in all walks of life from earliest age until older years throughout the culture, media, and institutions, etc.
- No organized, well-financed religious and political opposition to heterosexuality and traditionally gendered persons
- One's children would not be taken away or visitation privileges restricted or denied due to being heterosexual or traditionally gendered
- No fear of being "outed" as heterosexual or traditionally gendered in workplaces, communities, cultures, or families where being open with one's sexual orientation is dangerous
- No need to educate others about what it means to be heterosexual or traditionally gendered

- Ability to gain and share credit as heterosexual or traditionally gendered married couples
- No discrimination in housing, securing loans, or in seeking public accommodations due to being heterosexual or traditionally gendered
- No fear of losing one's job due to being heterosexual or traditionally gendered
- Tax and inheritance/survivorship benefits for married same-gendered couples
- Service providers and strangers automatically assume that members of a couple or singles are traditionally gendered or heterosexual.
- When discussing dating or sexual experiences, heterosexuals and traditionally gendered persons are never accused of "flaunting it."

Once people have become aware of their privilege, they can begin to develop skills that challenge them, especially as they oppress LBGT persons.

It is important for professional counselors interested in LBGT advocacy to have direct experiences with LBGT persons in a variety of professional and personal situations. Direct personal contact involving LBGT persons as the "experts" on heterosexism and transgenderism is a powerful device for listening and learning. It provides a chance for heterosexual and traditionally gendered advocates to hone their awareness, knowledge, and skills so that LBGT persons don't have to always assume the lead in challenging heterosexism and transgenderism.

Specific LBGT Advocacy Issues

Gay, bisexual, and transgendered men are disproportionately targeted by police for entrapment due to their sexual orientation. Lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women are prone to invisibility in a culture that erases their existence in many contexts, such as the lack of health care research conducted on lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women. Bisexual persons are targeted with shame/stigma by persons who don't believe bisexuals exist or that they are untrustworthy or lying about their sexual orientation. Transgendered persons are subject to loss of jobs, lack of health care coverage, and constant pressure to subscribe to a binary pattern of gender identity, appearance, and expression. Many LBGT persons in families are subject to harassment, abandonment, and abuse. LBGT persons in same-gender

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relationships lack civil rights and protections that heterosexual persons receive through legal marriage.

Because of the additive nature of multiple oppressions (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992; Pharr, 1988), people with additional nondominant cultural identities may be the targets of multiple forms of persecution. Among the LBGT persons who may be subjected to intense forms of oppression are persons of color, persons with disabilities, youth and older persons, poor and working class persons; persons with nondominant religious/ spiritual identities, women and girls, persons who speak English as a second language, with an accent, or not at all, noncitizens, single parents and other nontraditional family types, and persons with nondominant appearances. Culturally competent advocates in counseling take all of a person's cultural identities into account when collaborating on advocacy strategies.

Advocacy Against Internalized and Externalized Oppression

One of the most powerful ways that oppression operates for members of nondominant groups is that when people hear myths and stereotypes about themselves long enough, or when they don't have access to accurate information, or when they are subjected to repeated acts of trauma and violence they begin to believe the lies, myths, and stereotypes about themselves and members of their group, in this case, LBGT persons. They take responsibility for the myths and stereotypes and internalize them, or begin to believe them, which is what is known as internalized oppression (Chen-Hayes, 1997; Arnold & Lewis, 1998).

This may lead to LBGT persons: violating each other, isolation, increased chemical dependency, invisibility, guilt, shame, sex and gender negativity, dishonesty, believing that violence is the price one has to pay to be LBGT, and other forms of self-hatred. Externalized oppression is what is done, consciously or unconsciously, by members of dominant sexual orientations and gender identities to keep resources out of the hands of LBGT persons. It can be done on individual, cultural, and systemic/ institutional levels. Advocates for LBGT persons have many actions they can take to challenge externalized oppression.

Advocacy strategies for counselors on the individual level include:

- writing a letter or visiting an elected representative to promote hate crimes legislation, and other forms of civil

rights protections for LBGT persons, couples, and families; challenging myths and stereotypes about lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered persons (Chen-Hayes, 1997; Barret, 1998);

- interrupting hateful "jokes" about LBGT persons; giving accurate information about LBGT persons (Lewis & Arnold, 1998);
- having books and images in one's office/workplace that give a clear, affirming message about LBGT persons; ensuring that written and intake forms and spoken language used by school and agency personnel use inclusive language like partner instead of husband/wife or spouse and never assume a child, adolescent or adult's sexual orientation or gender identity; becoming an ally by taking on the struggles of LBGT persons (Lewis & Arnold, 1998).

On the cultural level, advocacy strategies include:

- inviting LBGT persons to be guest speakers in schools and agencies;
- using LBGT persons throughout the curriculum in all parts of the educational system (K-12 and in universities);
- subscribing to cable TV, magazines, newspapers, radio stations, and other forms of media that showcase LBGT persons without bias or stereotypes;
- supporting arts and cultural workers who showcase LBGT persons and cultural work;
- ensuring local community and school libraries have books and magazines that feature LBGT books and LBGT authors for all ages with content that is developmentally appropriate (SIECUS, 1996).

Advocacy strategies on the systemic level include:

- promoting a sex education curriculum in schools that is comprehensive, collaboratively designed with parents, teacher and administrators, and LBGT-affirming (SIECUS, 1996);
- creating a gay/straight (and bi/lesbian transgender) alliance in your school, agency, or community; creating a workplace or school or agency statement that creates a hate-free zone with zero tolerance for any/all oppressions/violence;
- developing work-related LBGT and ally support groups; developing a local chapter of PFLAG (Parents and

Friends of Lesbians and Gays) or GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network), both of whom are bisexual and transgender inclusive;
- creating and promoting legislation to reduce hate crimes and promote civil rights protection for persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities;
- challenging the medicalization of nondominant sexual orientations and nontraditional gender identities as pathological or sick;
- challenging religious organizations that oppress LBGT persons as "sinful" or "evil."

Conclusion

Professional counselors can play major leadership roles in advocacy by addressing issues at the individual, cultural, and institutional/systemic levels. They can work closely with their client-colleagues to challenge both internalized and externalized forms of oppression. The resources that counselors can use in this effort are many and varied, as the following list of WorldWide Web resources demonstrates.

LBGT Advocacy Web Resources

AGLBIC—Association for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling aglbic.org

BINET—Bisexual Network of the United States—www.binetusa.org

Bisexual Resource Center— www.biresource.org

IFGE—International Foundation for Gender Education www.ifge.org

Intersex Voices—www.qis.net/~triea/

PFLAG—Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays www.pflag.org

GLSEN—Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network www.glsen.org

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund—www.lambdalegal.org

National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum — www.nblglf.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights— www.nclrights.org

National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization —www.llego.org

!OUTPROUD! National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth— www.outproud.org

SIECUS—Sex Education and Information Council of the United States—www.siecus.org

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